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Title: Copy letter from Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain Donal O'Sullivan to HJ McCann, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting on a meeting with Secretary of State for Northern Ireland William Whitelaw regarding a proposed plebiscite on the constitutional position of Northern Ireland.

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June 30th 1972

Personal and Confidential

Dear Secretary

This is to confirm and add to what I told you on the telephone yesterday afternoon following my call on the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He was, obviously, under great pressure and my meeting with him lasted only about twenty minutes.

When I told him what the purpose of my call was he asked me to convey his apologies to the Taoiseach for having to move so quickly on the plebiscite question. He fully realised that this is a matter on which the Taoiseach has serious reservations. However, the pressures on him from the majority side are so great that he had to make a move.

Mr. Whitelaw went on to say that all his actions since the initiative have been in the direction of placating the minority. It is true that he had given firm assurances on the constitutional problem but the majority did not regard these as sufficient. They are on the point of exploding and he is now sitting on a powder keg. He very much hoped that the Taoiseach would understand his difficulties and the extreme risk of a Protestant outburst.

I then covered in my own words each of the points in the briefing note you sent me. As I disposed of each point he remarked that he fully agreed that it had great validity. But he has to take chances in an effort to bring both communities along with him. After I had dealt with the

final point about giving Unionism a new lease of life he said I could take it that whatever arrangement is come to it is not part of their intention here to restore the type of Stormont which existed previously. It was simply a disaster.

He then asked me to let the Taoiseach know that he does not regard himself as definitely committed to a plebiscite in September. As far as he could recall the indication he had given was that the plebiscite would probably be in September or not before September. If the internal situation in the North was unfavourable in September then he would consider himself quite free to delay the plebiscite to a more opportune time.

The next few weeks, he said, are crucial. Unfortunately the Protestants have plans for elaborate marches on the 12th July and these could be highly dangerous.

During recent days he has been making heartfelt appeals through various channels, for some easing of the 'no-go' areas in the Bogside and Creggan. If there is a favourable response this will be an enormous help in enabling him to calm down the Protestant element. He was still awaiting the results of his efforts. It was just possible that he may be able to say something to the House later in the evening.

It may be of some significance that while I was waiting in Mr. Whitelaw's private office for him to arrive there was a good deal of telephoning to ensure that his next visitor was not brought there but was to be put into another room. As I left I observed [REDACTED] through the half-open door of an adjoining office. She could well have been one of

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Mr. Whitelaw's channels of communication [REDACTED]

We had dinner at her home on Monday evening and she told me when I was leaving that she would have to remain awake as Daithi Ó Conaill was to telephone her at 1 a.m.

I took the opportunity during my call to give Mr. Whitelaw the text of the Taoiseach's reply to Deputy Cosgrave on Wednesday, and the text of the Supplementaries. He said he had been a bit worried at what he had read in the Guardian. Fortunately nobody had raised the Guardian report in the Debate in the House earlier in the afternoon. He then read carefully the text I had given him and said it presented a significantly different picture from that given by Simon Winchester. There was nothing in the Taoiseach's reply^{ll} with which he could in any way disagree.

Yours sincerely

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